DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 885 EA 026 672

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TITLE	Year-Round Schools: A Twenty-Year Follow-up Study of a Nationally Recognized Single Track Four-Quarter Plan at the High School Level.
INSTITUTION	Buena Vista City Public Schools, VA.
PUB DATE	Feb 95
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for Year-Round Education (San Diego, CA, February 11-15, 1995).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Costs; *Extended School Year; Flexible Scheduling; High Schools; Outcomes of Education; Program Effectiveness; *Public Schools; *Quarter System; School Schedules; *Summer Schools
IDENTIFIERS	Buena Vista City Public Schools VA

ABSTRACT

In 1973, the Virginia State Board of Education and the school board, faculty, and students of Buena Vista (Virginia) approved a four-quarter voluntary extended school-year plan for the Parry McCluer High School. This paper describes the review and planning process, as well as some of the program's outcomes 20 years later. Some of its objectives included: to increase the utilization of school facilities; to provide an optional fourth quarter in which students may enroll on a voluntary basis promotion, remediation, enrichment, and acceleration; to provide a cooperative work experience for students below the legal working age; to increase students' achievement scores; and to decrease the dropout rate. In 1994, the school board evaluated the extended school-year plan. Outcomes included an increase in the utilization of rooms and facilities, an increase in pupil enrollment, an increase in achievement scores, a decline in the pupil dropout rate, and overwhelming faculty and student support for continuation. In the past school year, over 50 percent of the student population attended school year-round. (LMI)

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BUENA VISTA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLS: A TWENTY-YEAR FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED SINGLE TRACK FOUR-QUARTER PLAN AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

PREPARED FOR
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION
NATIONAL CONVENTION

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
FEBRUARY 11-15, 1995

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The question most often asked is why implement a year-round or extended school program. Tradition has wed school systems to the September through June school calendar for pupil attendance. However, this outmoded agrarian calendar does not provide enough time to meet the educational needs of today's children. According to the NEA - National Center for innovation "The real issue is not just adding or manipulating time, but changing the fundamental way we do business." The contemporary educational system must include programs for the at-risk, for the potential drop-out, the accelerated, the remedial, the average, and the gifted children. The National Commission on Time and Learning Report states that "if experience, research, and common sense teach nothing else, they confirm the truism that people learn at different rates, and in different ways with different subjects." Year-round education addresses the needs of all children in a society which prohibits, with good reason, pupils from securing industrial employment until they are eighteen years old. A practical way to meet the educational needs of today's children in an informational, technological, and global society is to provide

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extended educational opportunities for learning with a year-round schedule.

In "Time for Results", published by the National governor's Association, the following statement was made:

> *It makes no sense to keep closed half a year the school buildings in which America has invested a quarter of a trillion dollars while we are under-educated and over-crowded.*

According to Charles Ballinger, Executive Director of National Council for Year-Round Education, "the idea of modifying the school calendars has much going for it to reduce learning loss and encourage the remediation or enrichment of a student's work." Dennis P. Doyle and Chester Finn, Jr. in the September 1985 issue of Principal stated, "A longer school year could help the school reformers achieve many of their objectives including higher pay for teachers, opportunities for disadvantaged and slow-learning youngsters to catch up, enrichment programs for the gifted, and simplification of child-care problems encountered by working parents during the long summer holiday."

Secondary schools have something in common with the graveyards. You don't change or remove graveyards, and likewise you don't change secondary schools. In order to change the public high school we are going to have to develop a plan that restructures the curriculum to that of teaching students rather than courses. Seeking ways of improving student's performance and raising academic standards is a concern of every state in this nation. In the 1930's America made a great decision when it decided to teach every American to write his/her name. Now, Americans have a new literacy standard. This new literacy standard requires that every American must be able to read, write, and decipher and read a "blue print." This new literacy standard is a mandate from the business and corporate sectors.

The Nation at Risk addressed the reasons for educational reform by the identification of thirty-six educational issues in need of improvement. One of these issues was the need to extend the school year (Year-round Education). The extended school year can assist in providing the much needed time to enhance the quality of education and the quantity of education. The issues of saving money and of alleviating overcrowding are important, but are secondary reasons for the implementation of year-round schedules.

School districts should address the reform issues based on locally identified educational needs. Buena Vista addressed the issue from the viewpoint of what would be best for the children in an industrial community with a student population that profiles the bell curve in ability. The aspirations of the people included economic development and maintenance of a viable city that would have no future if it were not for the maintenance and the recruitment of new business and industry. The city's economy centers around ten major manufacturing plants.

Rationale for Changing High School Organization

As part of the program reform movement, Virginia, like many other states, has increased the requirements for students to graduate from high school from 18 to 23 units of credit for the academic diploma. The 23 unit academic diploma requires the student to take six subjects for three of their four years of high school. These students will eagerly enroll in extended school year programs. The new academic diploma makes the extended school year an integral part of the high school program.

The exciting part about year-round education is that it includes courses for the average student, as well as for the gifted and the remedial students. We have a large group of students

in the mid-section of the bell curve (seventy percent of our students are average).

In 1972-73, report cards were being issued to the students every nine weeks. The parents were excited about the quarter system issuing the report cards every six weeks.

The governance of American education is decentralized and no one person makes the final decision on matters of education. Many of us know everything about education; "How many of us are capable of writing a first grade speller?" Norman Brekke, past president of the National Association for Year-Round Education stated that there are two hundred forty-seven days in a school year available for instructional purposes. It is easy to divide the school year into four sixty-day blocks of time. Parental vacation is something that must be considered in planning year-round scheduling. Consideration must be given to the fact that the parents prefer a four-season vacation schedule over the agrarian schedule.

A good way to introduce an extended school program is to begin with the word voluntary. Your plan may be in trouble if you announce the program as being mandatory. If you mandate the year-round schooling without prior planning and justification, your teachers and students are going to "rise up in arms."

Year-round education is a national issue. President George Bush chose Mr. Jefferson's home in Virginia as the place to introduce his Education Agenda. One of his initiatives includes voluntary extended school programs in every school district in America. Every school district is different and you cannot take one district's program and place it in another district because of this diversity. The educational needs of adjoining districts usually vary for many reasons. Buena Vista has an industrial population with a diversified student population in need of programs for promotion, remediation, enrichment and acceleration. A number of the Buena

Vista patrons had expressed interest in year-round schooling for its pupils in Buena Vista. By survey, a needs assessment revealed that twenty-three percent of pupils at the secondary level would attend a voluntary extended or year-round program. The research revealed that ninety percent of the high school students in the city were under eighteen years of age and ineligible to work in the industrial plants, as prohibited by Federal and State regulation. The research provided the school board with information that a large group of high school students were eligible and would attend a year-round school program. Each school district has a similar group of students waiting for an extension of the school program.

The National Association for Year-round Education and the National Commission on Time and Learning are advocates for permissive legislation by the state and federal governments that encourages year-round education. The legislation should permit each local school district to make decisions about what is best for its children in the development of year-round programs. Each level of government must work together because we are America's Educational Team, and that is the only way year-round education will succeed. Buena Vista's extended school program has one quarter with two blocks with a minimum of 150 hours of instruction. The regular year has three independent quarters with two block classes in each quarter with a minimum of 150 hours of instruction for each block class. The extended school year does not have the interruption of clubs, ball games, and so forth. In 1969 we had 3% of our children enrolled in the traditional semester summer program. In 1973, the state board of education, school board, faculty, and students approved the four quarter voluntary extended school year for our high school. In the first year of operation we exceeded the enrollment goal of twenty-five percent of the regular day school pupils. The extended (quarter) program has enrolled forty-seven percent

to sixty-seven percent of our regular high school students over the twenty year period that the program has been in existence. The staff presented a radio program and was asked "would we reach eighty percent attendance in the extended school year?" Our response was "We did not think so." In 1990, each Virginia division superintendent was given the authority to mandate year-round schooling for all children that fell below the twenty-fifth percentile. Buena Vista enacted the requirement without parental complaint.

Consideration of Systems for Operation

Many systems of operation were considered before the establishment of an "extended school calendar" or "year-round" program for the children in Buena Vista. Three extended school year plans were reviewed in depth with the idea that each such program was not an end in itself but a vehicle for the attainment of "educational excellence" in the local school division. The extended school year plans studied extensively were the Forty-Five Fifteen Plan, the Atlanta Plan, and the Continuous Progress Plan. After much study and evaluation, the administration and staff concluded that a quarter system, with a voluntary summer quarter that included free tuition and transportation, would meet the needs of the students in grades nine through twelve.

Parry McCluer High School, located in an industrial city with a population of 7,000, has approximately 350 students in grades nine through twelve. The school has twenty-seven teachers with a pupil-teacher ration of 11.1 to 1. Over fifty percent of the teachers hold advanced degrees including a foreign language and science teacher with doctoral degrees. The school is fully accredited by the Virginia State Department of Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Endorsements and Approvals For Change

Before implementing the extended school year (quarter system), a number of approvals had to be obtained to insure the success of the program including:

1. *Parry McCluer High School Faculty - April 1973*
2. *Parry McCluer High School Students - May 1973*
3. *Public Hearings for Citizen Input - April-June 1973*
4. *Buena Vista City School Board - May 1973*
5. *Virginia State Board of Education - July 1973*
6. *Buena Vista City School Board - 1973 - Present - Annual approval*
7. *Buena Vista City School Board - 1995 - Block Schedule*

The Buena Vista City School Board in regular session on May 21, 1973, approved, on recommendation of the administration, faculty, and students, the following resolution concerning a four-quarter program of instruction in grades nine through twelve to be effective with the 1973-74 session:

> *While the School Board is not approving a mandatory twelve month school plan and no child will be required to attend summer school under the compulsory attendance law, the school board approves the division of the regular school session into three parts and the change in curriculum to allow one-third credit for each completed quarter. It also approves the expansion of the elective courses in the summer and regular session and directs the administration to apply for approval from the State Board of Education for the one-third credit.*

The Virginia State Board of Education in its regular meeting on March 29, 1973 approved the request of the City School Board of Buena Vista to offer unit credit in increments of less than one-half units, stating the following:

> *It is understood that this waiver of current accrediting standard will allow you to organize your program at Parry McCluer High School into a quarter program which will eventually lead to a year-round operation. It is further understood that all other requirements would be met, including the number of units required for graduation and the 150 clock hours of instruction.*

Program Objectives

The objectives of the program were to implement a plan for the development and implementation of a quarter plan to provide year-round schooling in grades nine through twelve in the city of Buena Vista. Specifically, the objectives were as follows:

1. *To develop and implement a four-quarter system for high school pupils*
2. *To increase the utilization of school facilities*
3. *To provide an optional fourth-quarter to enable pupils to enroll on a voluntary basis for promotion, remediation, enrichment and acceleration*
4. *To provide a meaningful summer program for students below the legal age to work in the local industries*
5. *To increase students' achievement scores to a level that equals or exceeds their abilities and/or the national average*
6. *To decrease the drop-out rate to a level below the state average*
7. *To determine the success of the extended school year (218 days) plan based on the attitude of the pupils and teachers participating in the four-quarter system as revealed by questionnaire*

Program Change

The regular school year was divided into three sixty-day quarters. Each student is given the course objectives at the beginning of each quarter for the quarter's academic expectations. Teachers prepared curriculum guides for each course of study with the support of the Virginia Department of Education Pilot Funds in the amount of $16,506.15 and a transportation grant of $4,329.00. Report cards are sent to parents each six weeks. Two six-week periods constitute one quarter of work and two units of credit. The pupil's six weeks grade is determined by weighing the class work (four-fifths or eighty percent) and the examination (one-fifth or twenty

percent). Each quarter course is an independent unit; however, each course is block scheduled with students taking two block courses during each quarter (twelve weeks).

In the summer quarter a student may enroll in two block courses of study for enrichment, acceleration, promotion and remediation. A student may complete up to eight units of credit each year in the four-quarter plan. Student and faculty participation in the extended school fourth quarter is voluntary.

Monetary Considerations

The superintendent of the Buena Vista City Public Schools, believes that every secondary school in America should have the opportunity to develop and implement an extended year-round school program. Many of the cost considerations for an extended school year are already in the division budget, such as debit service, insurance, hospitalization, guidance, administration, textbooks, custodial services and capital outlay for busing. The three most expensive components in the implementation of an extended school year program are instructional salaries, air conditioning, and student materials.

Financial Savings to the Taxpayer

The financial savings to the taxpayer can be demonstrated by the cost of the extended school year as compared to the cost of a full year's instruction when a student fails a grade and has to remain in high school for an extra year. In the summer of 1994 the added instructional costs for each pupil attending the extended school year was $141.56 per pupil including transportation. The per student cost for the regular school year in 1993-94 was $4,783.00.

Therefore, each student attending and advancing in the extended year program rather than repeating failed grades saved the taxpayer $4,641.44. In 1994 twenty-eight students who failed in the regular session elected to attend and advance in the summer session at a cost of $141.56 each per student rather than repeat at a cost of $4,783.00 each. This was a gross savings to the taxpayer of $129,960.52. The high school principal, Mr. Wayne D. Flint, firmly states that without the extended school year the administration would have to add three additional faculty members to the high school staff for an approximate cost of $120,000.00.

The school board, administration and faculty had to make provisions for the following organizational changes:

1. *The teaching calendar had to be revised to conform to a four-quarter system and the block schedule with mini-breaks for the faculty, students and parents that conformed with community customs.*

2. *The faculties and principal had to revise the student report cards to conform to a four-quarter system with six-week grading periods.*

3. *The guidance counselors and principal had to revise the student scholastic records to conform with the extended four-quarter system and six-week grading periods.*

4. *The curriculum in each subject area had to be revised to include expected student performances, objectives, and terminal outcomes to conform to the four-quarter system.*

Program Review and Evaluation

When the school buildings are being used on a year-round basis, you get a more favorable response when asking for community support. The citizens respond with the statement, "Oh, you're year-round; that's wonderful." Business and industry favor year-round education for economic reasons. In America, we have over one-third of a trillion dollars worth of school buildings sitting vacant twenty-five percent of the time. And yet we have the child at risk, the

need for the gifted, the need for the average child, the drop-out problem, and the business' need for skilled workers who can demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics. About fifty percent of the Buena Vista students attend the summer quarter for promotion and remediation, and about fifty percent attend for enrichment and acceleration. In the traditional summer program three percent of the students were enrolled for remediation. You can continue the old agrarian model for scheduling the school calendar, but let's concede that it is outdated.

Buena Vista has about fifty percent of its juniors and seniors enrolled in the dual enrollment courses with students taking both high school and college courses. We have a relationship with Dabney S. Lancaster Community College that allows the high school students to take college courses taught by qualified Buena Vista teachers and to receive credit at the high school and college level. These children can and do earn up to one year of college credit while in high school. The dual enrollment tuition is paid by the school board. The teachers are employed by the college and by the school board as regular faculty members. The dual enrollment includes year-round classes. The dual enrollment program permits students to bridge the gap between high school and college. The students remain in their academic classes Tuesdays and Thursdays for additional help, and attend class on campus Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. All classes meet the standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The research from a dissertation study by a doctoral student at the University of Rochester revealed that " all groups (parents, students, and teachers) concur that those who have attended the extended school year program have increased their knowledge more than they would have

if they had not attended."[1] *Our elected and governing officials think this program is one of the best programs we have implemented to improve the high school curriculum.*

Regarding student age, ninety percent of the children in a school system are under eighteen years of age and are ineligible to work in most industries and businesses. Some students work to earn money for college; however, most do not. Therefore, you have a ready market to extend the school year.

Our standardized test scores have improved since implementation of the extended school year. I am not an advocate of National Standardized Test Scores, but each school official has had little choice but to deal with the issue.

Will teachers support institutionalization of extended year? Eighty-six percent of our faculty do not want the extended school program removed from the community, sixty-seven percent of our students do not want it removed (1994). We have an independent survey that states that ninety percent of our citizens feel that we have a successful educational program.

In 1994, the Buena Vista City School Board conducted a twenty year evaluation of the four-quarter extended school year plan that brought year-round education to the high school pupils in the city of Buena Vista. The evaluation of the tuition free, four-quarter system with voluntary enrollment for the extended school year (218 days in high school grades 9-12) revealed:

1. *An effective four-quarter plan for one hundred percent of the high school pupils that included a voluntary, tuition free four-quarter with over fifty-four percent of the regular day pupils enrolling during the summer quarter of 1993*

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[1] *Josephine F. Farrell, "Case Study of an Extended School Year Program", Ed. D. Diss University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, 1991, p. 106.*

2. *An increase in room or facility utilization*

3. *An increase in pupil attendance with the implementation of a voluntary fourth quarter for promotion, remediation, enrichment and acceleration; twelve percent of the pupils for promotion, forty-seven percent for enrichment, forty percent for remediation, and one percent for acceleration during the summer of 1993*

4. *An increase in pupil attendance during the fourth quarter for pupils below the legal age to work in local industries*

5. *An increase in the pupil achievement scores to a level equal to or above the national average*

6. *A decrease in the local pupil dropout rate to 1.8 percent as compared to the state average of 3.4 percent (1993)*

7. *An eighty-six percent recommendation from the regular school faculty and a sixty-seven percent recommendation from the regular day students participating in the extended school year plan in 1993-94 for continuation of the four-quarter system in Buena Vista*

In conclusion, the twenty year follow-up study of the extended school year at the high school level (9-12) reveals that over fifty percent of our high school students attend year-round. The reasons for attending the year-round program are promotion, enrichment, acceleration and remediation. As a result of the year-round program the student achievement scores have increased to a level equal to or greater than the national average, there has been a financial savings to the taxpayers. Overall, there has been a decline in drop-outs. The drop-out rate seems to vary from year to year. A majority of the faculty and students report that the extended school year has not affected student extracurricular activities or interfered with family vacations.

The Buena Vista Extended School Year Plan that provides twelve month schooling has the potential for replication on a nationwide basis. Dr. Charles Ballinger has stated the Buena Vista Extended School-Year Plan is "a high school model for the nation". Buena Vista has the only operational high school in Virginia with a four-quarter plan. As stated by Ernest Boyer, in

ASCD Update, November, 1986, "The Buena Vista extended year program is a viable extended school year program where high school students can attend for three quarters and may volunteer to extend their studies, tuition free, in a fourth quarter."

According to Boyer, the governors task force on school facilities concluded that a year-round calendar is desirable because it:

> *alleviates or at least postpones the need to build new schools during periods of temporary enrollment increases.... Most important, educators to date have found that improved academic performance can result from a restructured calendar that shortens the vacation periods away from formal instruction.*

In a regional meeting conducted for locally elected officials and school board chairman, Dr. S. John Davis, Virginia State Superintendent of Public Instruction (1988), stated that he favored local school boards having the option to mandate summer school or an extended school year for students in need of remediation. Since 1988-89, the Virginia General Assembly began providing equalized state funds to extend the school year for students scoring below the twenty-five percentile on standardized achievement tests. On the national level the North Branch High School in North Branch, Minnesota implemented the Buena Vista Program in 1987-88 with plans to expand the program each year.

The Buena Vista Program has been cited by more than twenty state and national publications such as AASA Leadership News, September 30, 1988; Christian Science Monitor, June 13, 1994; Roanoke Times and World News, January 11, 1986, September 28, 1990, February 13, 1991, August 4, 1991, August 12, 1994, October 22, 1994; U.S. News and World Report, January 13, 1993, February 19, 1990; The Year Rounder, published by the National Association for Year-Round Education, September 1991, and Summer 1988; Smart Schools Smart

Kids, Fiske, Edward B., published by Simon and Schuster, 1991, p. 98-99; Washington Post, March 2, 1992; National School Board Association School Board News, May 28, 1991; USA Today, January 14, 1986, August 13, 1986, March 6, 1989, and August 28, 1991;

In 1989, the program received the American Association of School Administrators Award For Professional/Practitioner Excellence in Research. In 1986, the program received the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Excellence Education Award, and in 1983 and in 1989 the program was recognized by the Virginia Education Research Association for significant research in the field of education.

The National Education Association has adopted the following policy statement concerning summer school, extended school year and year-round education:

> *The National Education Association local affiliates must participate in the design, authorization, implementation, evaluation, and continuation of the summer school, the extended school year, and year-round schools . . . Employment in these programs must be on a voluntary basis.*

The Buena Vista School Board before implementation of the extended school year program received approval from its faculty, students and community. The faculty and students have continued to support the continuation of the program as is evident in the five year, ten year, and twenty year follow-up studies. Community and political support has been over- whelming because of more efficient building utilization and the savings to the taxpayer. The teachers, students and parents have endorsed the program because of the increased opportunities for students to learn and enroll on a voluntary basis. The superintendent has stated that he believes that "year-round education is becoming a 'long awaited' national movement". The primary purpose of the Buena Vista program has been to enhance and improve the quality of education. By survey in Buena Vista the research fails to support the notion that the extended school year

limits student participation in student activities and has a major interference with family vacations. The superintendent has stated that "the bottom line is that the nations children have tremendous needs that can be better addressed through year-round schooling" and "American business could not operate on a schedule with twenty-five percent of its facilities on vacation each year".

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